



SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER  
OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE  
AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA

**Towards a global compact on refugees**  
Thematic discussion five  
Contribution by H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann

***Panel Two: How can we ensure a whole-of-society response to large movements of refugees and protracted situations?***

In reply to this question, the Sovereign Order of Malta, in its capacity as a signatory and initiator of the “Charter for faith-based humanitarian action” endorsed at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, wishes to concentrate on the points highlighting Faith-based organizations and Host communities.

- Conflict, which in itself is a driver for displacement and forced migration is a central issue for FBOs. Religious motivations can induce violence when separated from moral content and poisoned by corruption and driven by power. Factors such as being a member of a religious group other than the majority of the society was one of the earliest reasons that pushed people into exile. Conflicts may contain religious elements. However, they are mostly driven by cultural, economic, ethnic, territorial and other factors such as external pressures. Religious identity is currently politically abused as divider in a large number of conflicts worldwide; faith-based organisations are therefore even more compelled to offer protection by promoting special attention and solidarity towards people on the move.
- But Religion can be a driver for assistance and compassion as well. Religion is the good driver behind humanitarian FBOs which are committed to help people, regardless of their race or religion. Working in conflict areas and protracted crises requires a long-term commitment that FBOs provide by their nature and their self-identity. They can be a rich source of reconciliation, social tolerance, devotion, humanitarian commitment, empowerment and peacebuilding. They have insight into specific contexts; and understand the viability of different perspectives on refugees, especially with regard to the identity of the host country (e.g. in Turkey, where the decision for the integration of a large Arab-speaking Syrian refugee population

might have a decisive influence on the prevailing idea of a cultural homogenous nation; in Lebanon, where the presence of a large number of Sunni-Muslim Syrian refugees might shift the fragile balance and peaceful co-existence of different religious groups).

- Concerning the issues of integration and social peace, FBOs and religion play a vital role in a whole-of-society approach. For many people who are living in refugee conditions religion is gaining importance. They bethink their tradition and roots and are looking for a cultural environment they can call home. Beyond the mere delivery of physical goods and services FBOs should provide cultural and spiritual space propitious to resilience. Material assistance therefore needs to be combined with an ethical and spiritual dimension.
- In the case of host and refugee communities practising different faiths, FBOs can and should act as a bridge so as to ensure mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

The Order of Malta therefore encourages States to recognize FBOs as a crucial actor in the humanitarian refugee response and proposes that their role be clearly acknowledged in the Global Compact on Refugees.

*Geneva, 15 November 2017*